THEY LIVED LIKE THIS IN ANCIENT PALESTINE

Marie Neurath & Evelyn Worboys

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of the Isotype Institute

Franklin Watts, Inc.
845 Third Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

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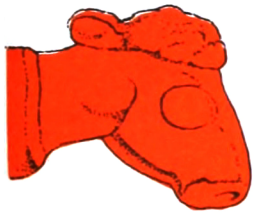
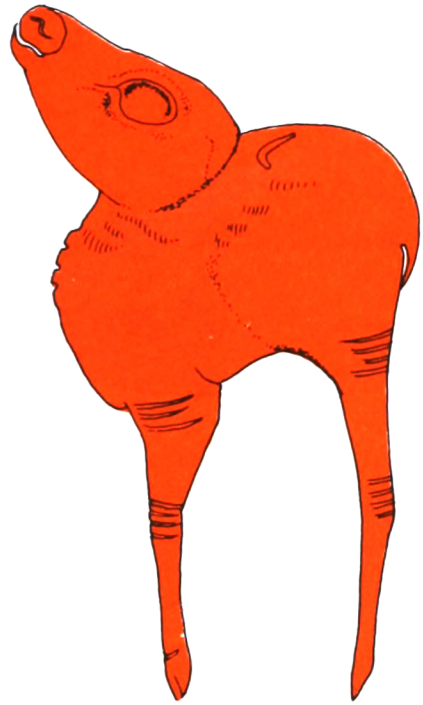
Published by Max Parrish & Co., Ltd.
Printed in the U.S.A. by The Moffa Press
SBN 531-01384-7

ANCIENT PALESTINE

The history of Palestine begins thousands of years before the time of Abraham. Nobody could write it down. But people who cannot write often make pictures or carvings which tell about the things they see.



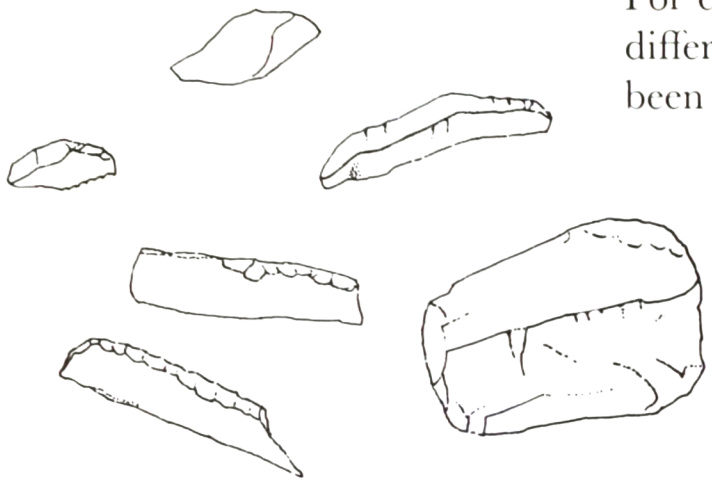
Here are two
very old carvings
of a goat's head
and a young fawn.



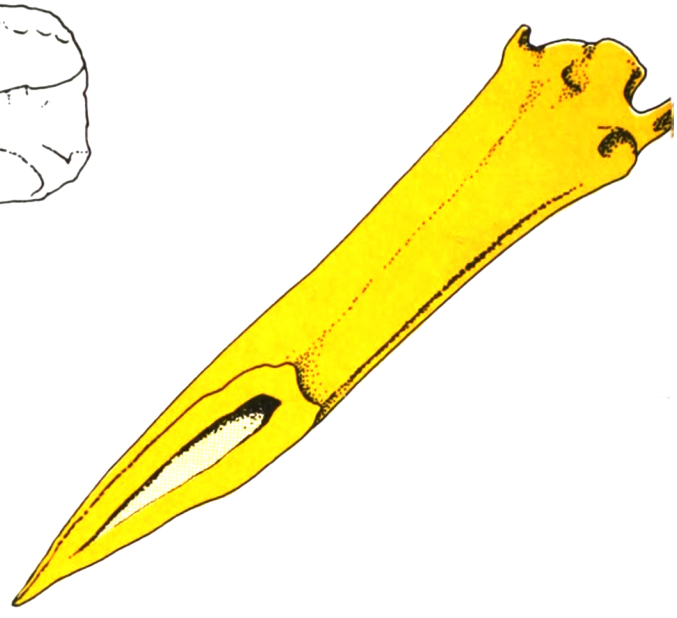
They were made by people in Palestine about ten thousand years ago, when there were many animals in the country, game for the hunters.
There were even elephants.

Heaps of bones, left over from their meals, have been found in the caves where the hunters lived. Other things were left behind in the caves too. When these are carefully studied they tell a great deal about the life of early times.

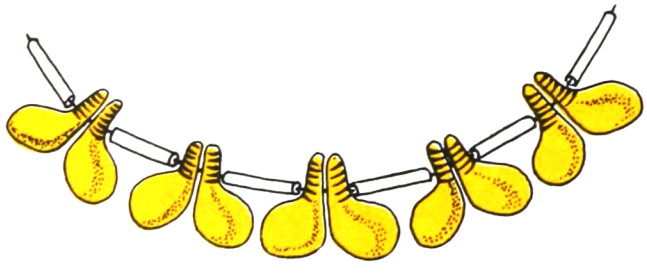
For example, sharpened stones of different shapes and sizes have been found,



and pieces of bone, sharpened like needles.

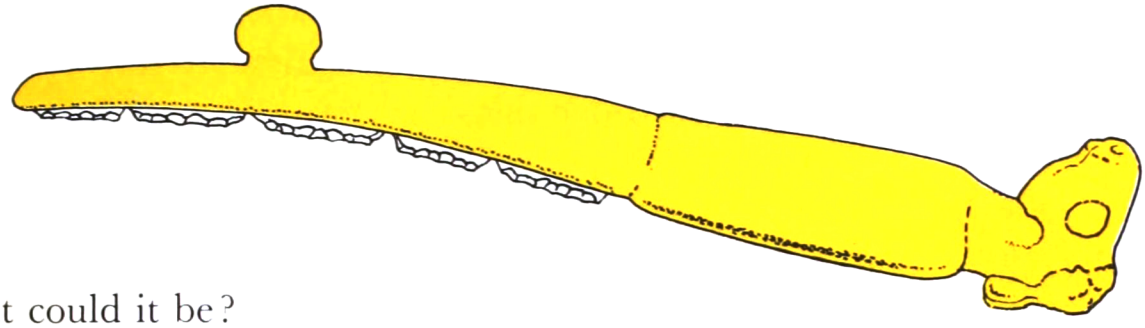


These come from a cave on Mount Carmel, near the coast of Palestine. They were the early men's tools – their knives to cut meat, their spearheads to kill animals, their tools to carve bones.



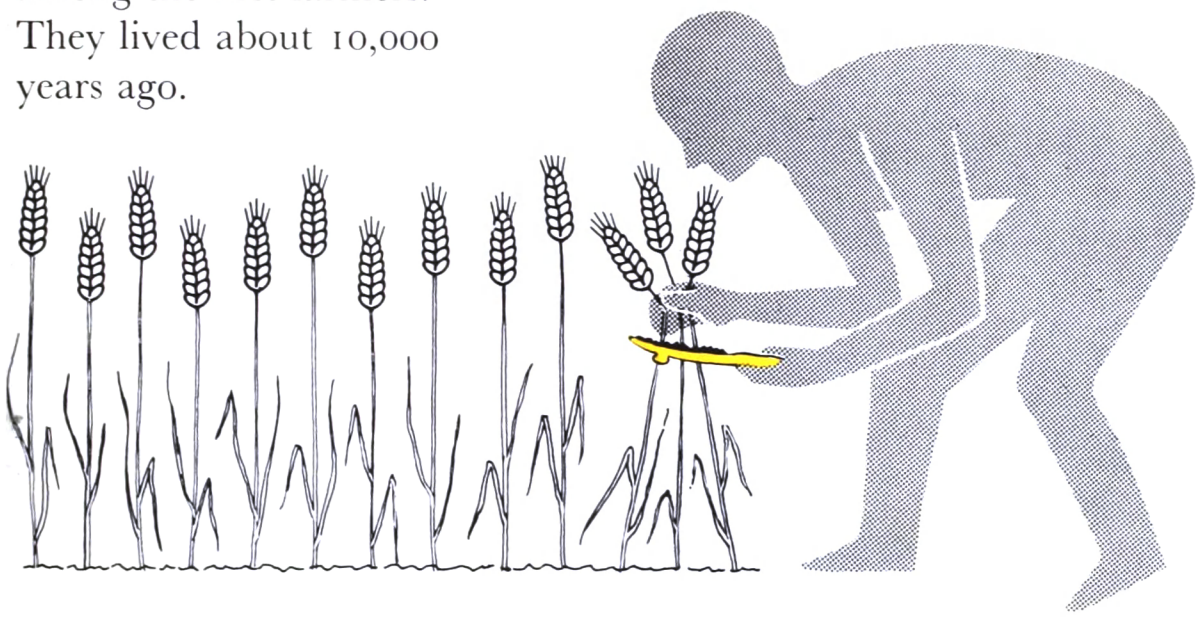
These beads of bone were even pierced and strung together into a necklace.

But more amazing even than the necklace was something else . . .

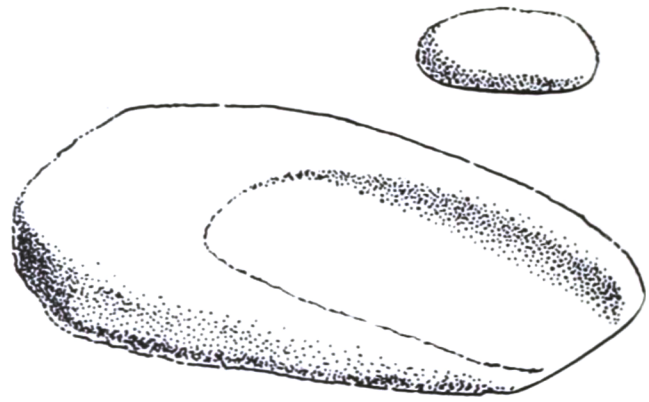


What could it be?
This longish bone with a goat's head could hold a row of sharp stones.

It was used for cutting grass
or grain crops. It is the
oldest sickle that has been
found anywhere in the world.
The people who used it were
among the first farmers.
They lived about 10,000
years ago.

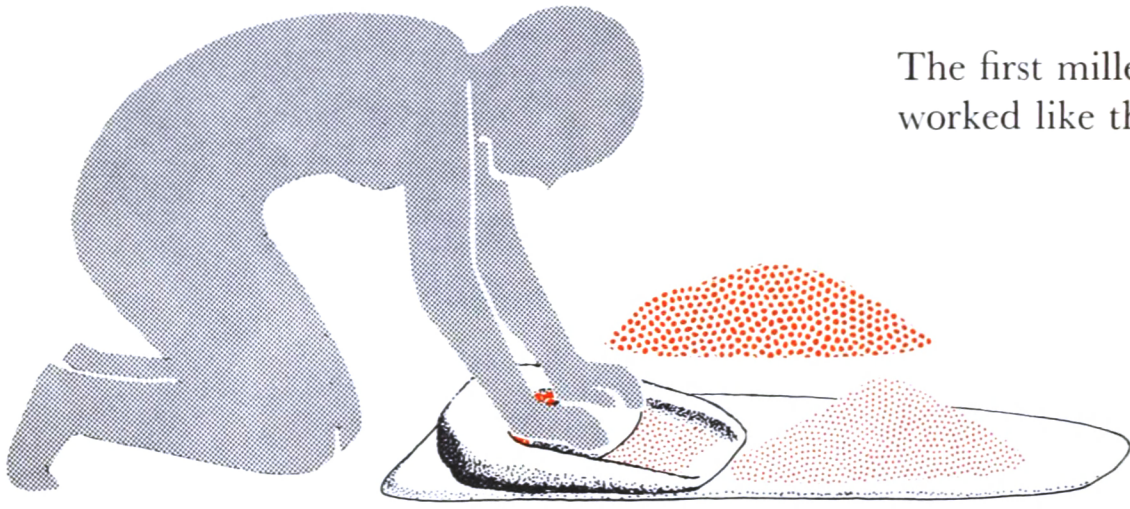


Sickles were found at other places too, showing that their use spread as more people became farmers. In places where they lived, coarse stones were found which looked like this:



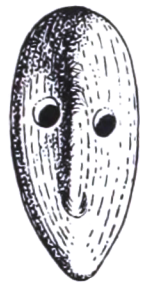
The larger stone has a rim around three sides but not on the fourth. The smaller stone fits into the hollow and is just the right size to be held in the hands.

These stones were used to grind grain into flour.



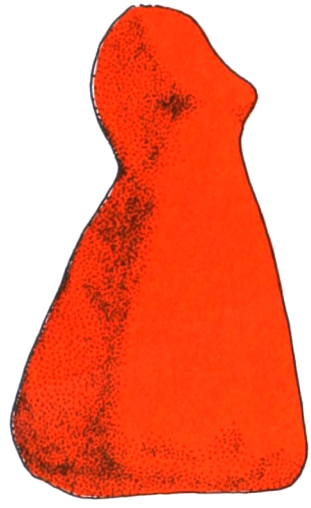
The first millers worked like this.

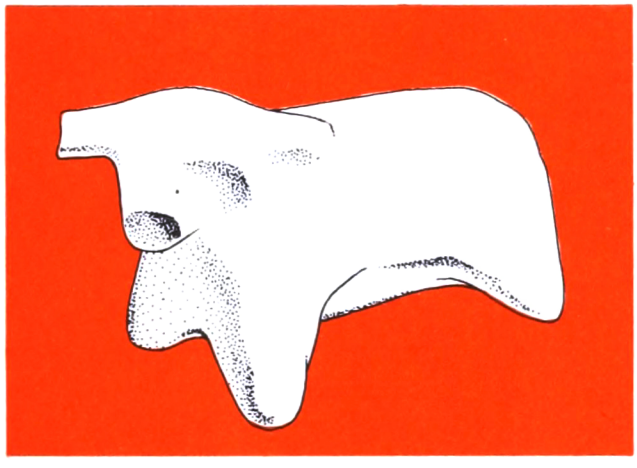
The early farmers made other things besides tools.



This is a tiny face,
cut out of bone.

This is part of a little
figure of a woman,
perhaps a mother
goddess.



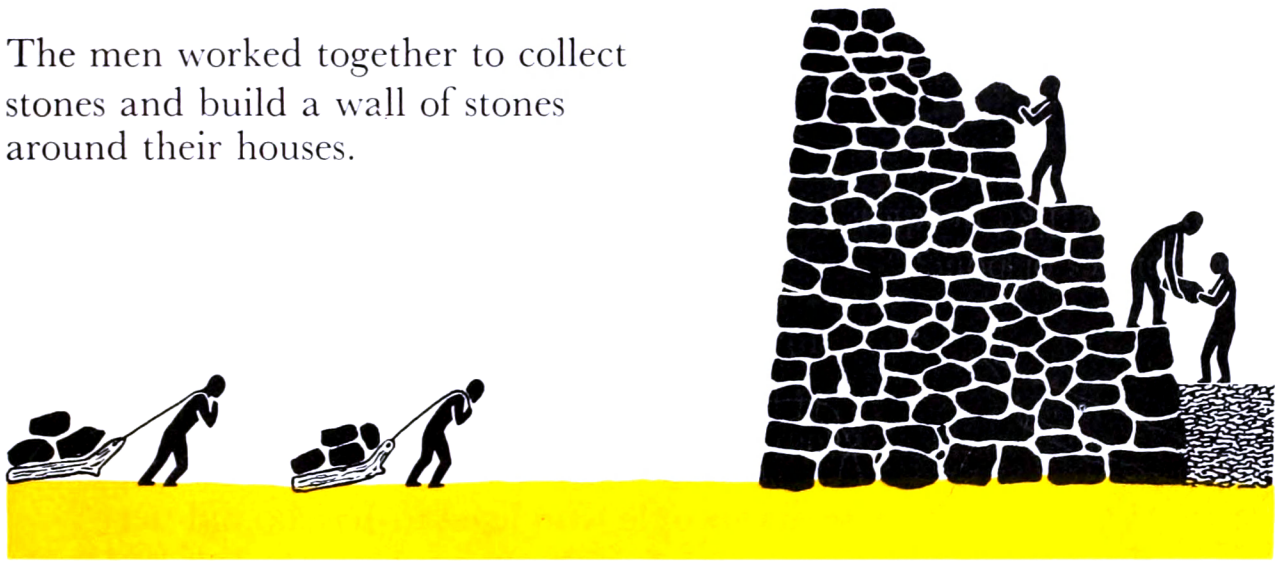


This stone is made into an
animal; it may be a cow.

Although these things look like toys, they were probably used for rites and offerings, which the people believed necessary for a good harvest and to ensure that more animals were born.

The farmers soon left their caves and built houses in places where they found good soil. In very early times they settled near a spring in the hot valley of the river Jordan which cuts deep into the mountain land. This spring is not far from the place where the Jordan enters the salty Dead Sea. The fresh spring water, surrounded by trees and plants, must have attracted more people than any other place at the time, and their village grew into a town – perhaps the first town on earth.

The men worked together to collect stones and build a wall of stones around their houses.

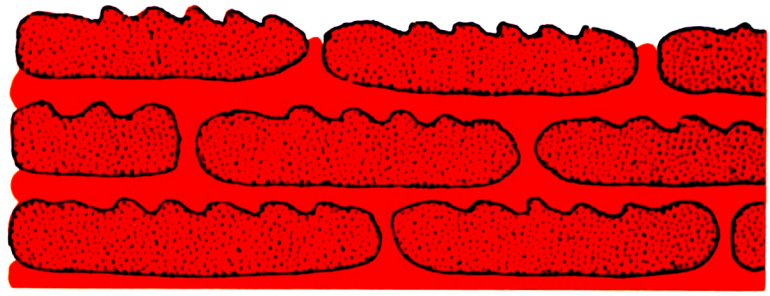


This was the wall of Jericho. It remained famous for thousands of years. It was rebuilt many times, as it was destroyed by earthquakes and fires and, later, perhaps also by enemies. Many towns grew up in Palestine and nearby countries. After tilling their fields, the farmers went home to sleep in safety behind their town walls.

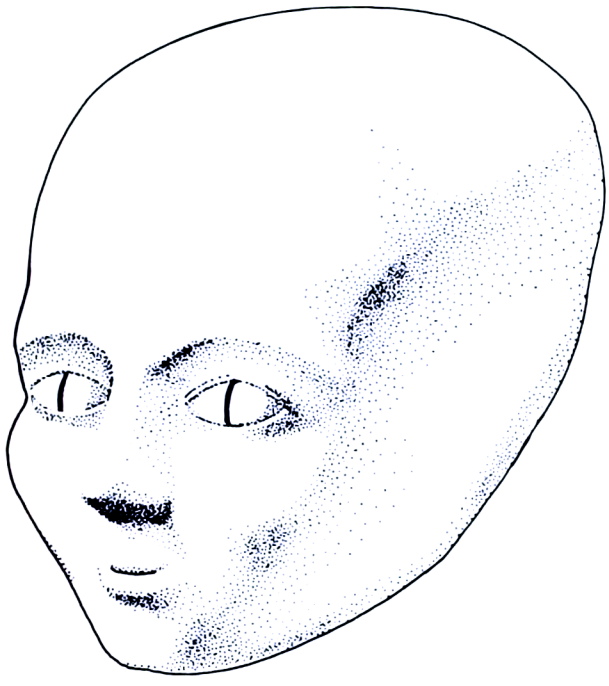
The early houses of Jericho were round, built of mud which hardened in the hot sun. Later, bricks were used.

The first bricks were formed by hand.

Placed on top of each other, they made a straight-sided wall, so houses became more like the shape we know today.

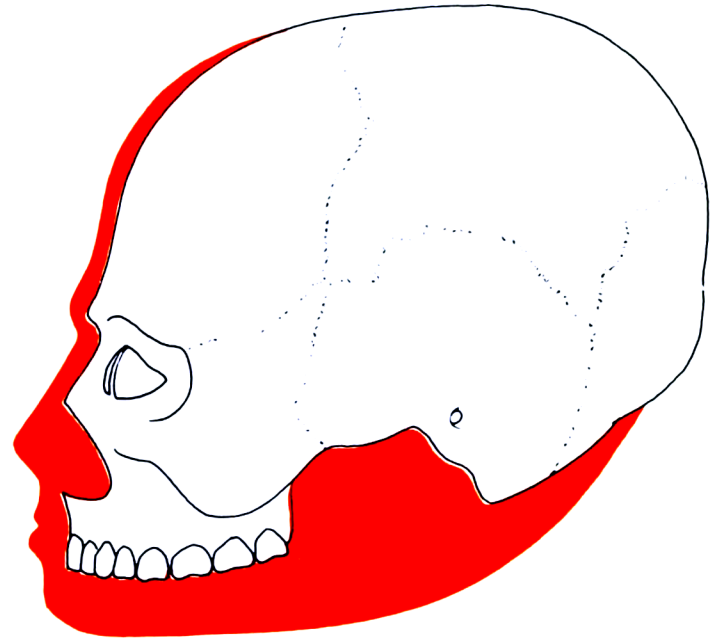


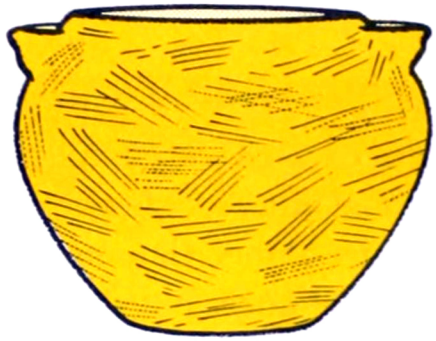
The first people who lived in Jericho did not make clay pots. They must have used dishes made of horns, skulls, stone or wood.
They did not use their clay only for bricks, however: they also formed it into human faces!
Some are quite flat like masks.
Shells were used for the eyes.



Other heads were found in tombs under the houses. At first glance they may look like sculpture, but they are well-preserved human skulls with shells where the eyes had been.

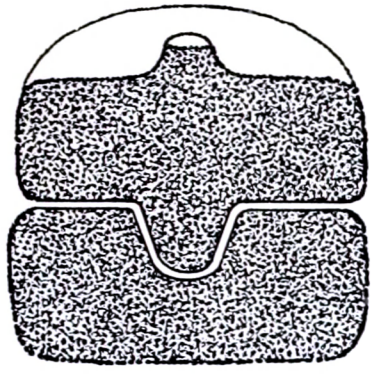
Clay was added to shape the cheeks, the nose, the chin and the mouth. Perhaps it was believed that in this way a person was given life after death.





We do not know who first had the idea of making clay pots. People who knew how to make pottery moved into Jericho. The earliest pots found there were shaped by hand, and they were rather coarse.

Then better pots appeared, smooth and round and decorated with drawings. They were made in a new way.

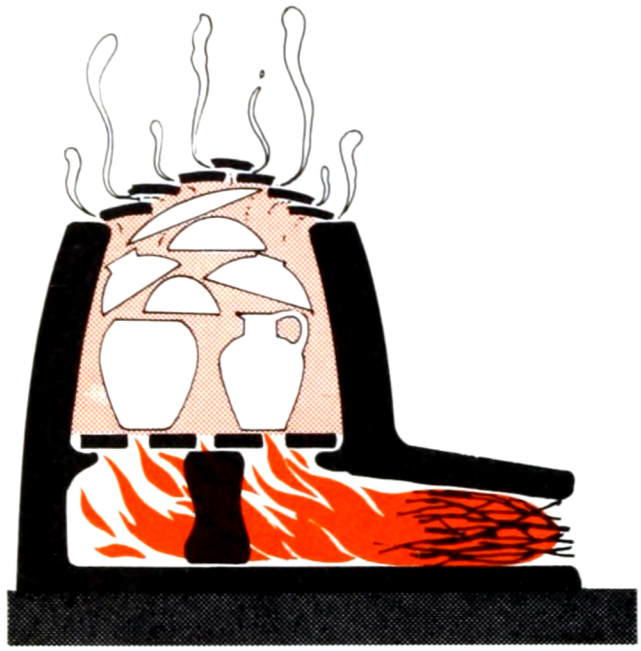


The potter's wheel had been invented. It consisted of two flat circular stones fitted together. The upper one could spin like a top in a socket in the centre of the one below.

Cut through the middle, the potter's wheel would look like this.

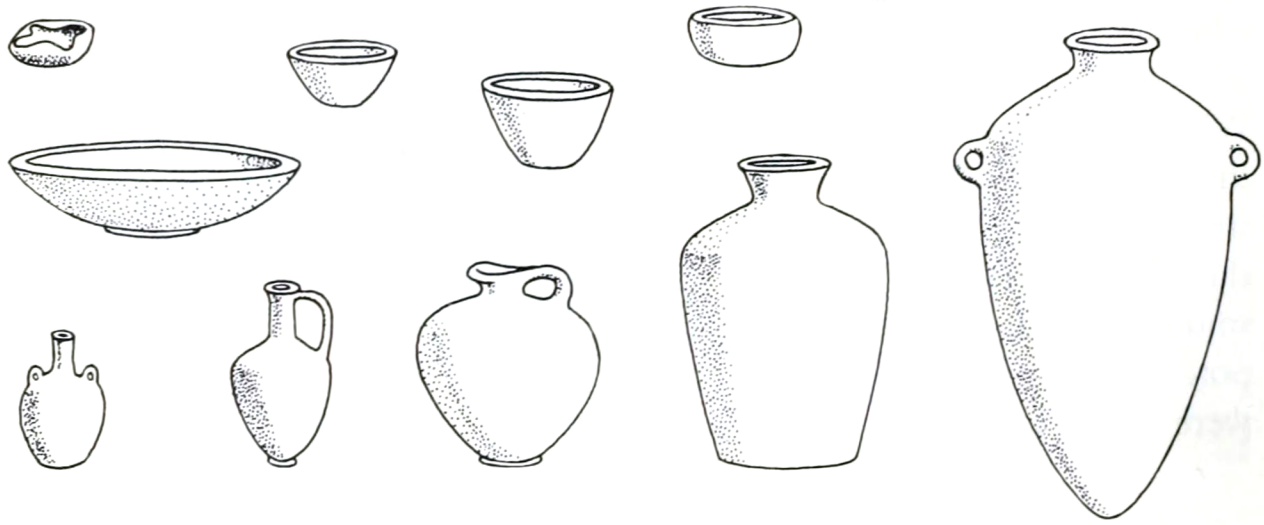
The wet, soft lump of clay was put on top, in the middle of the wheel, which was turned by foot or hand. While it was spinning, the potter, with a steady hand, guided the clay to make a smooth, evenly-shaped pot. Spouts and handles were added afterwards.

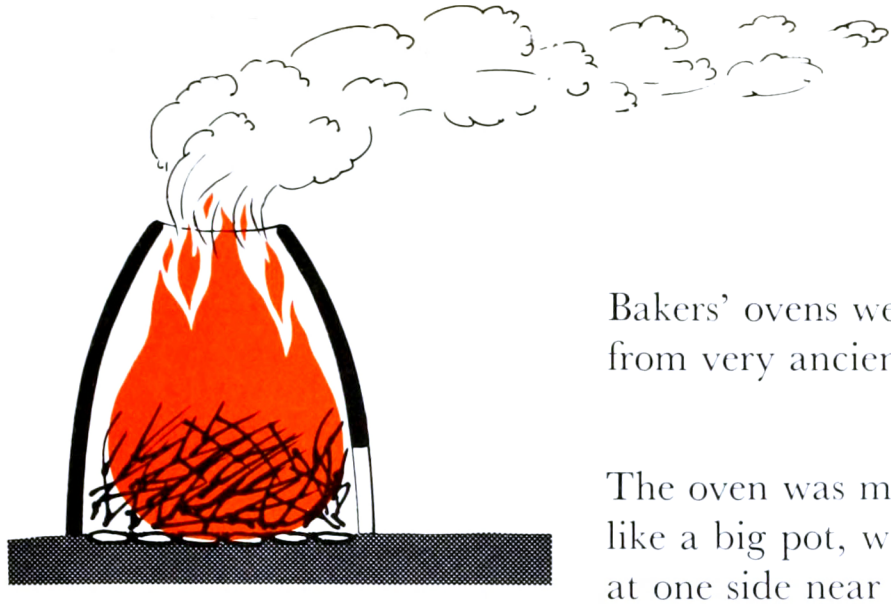
The old coarse pots with thick sides were dried and hardened in the sun. When fire was used to harden the clay, pots with thinner sides were made.

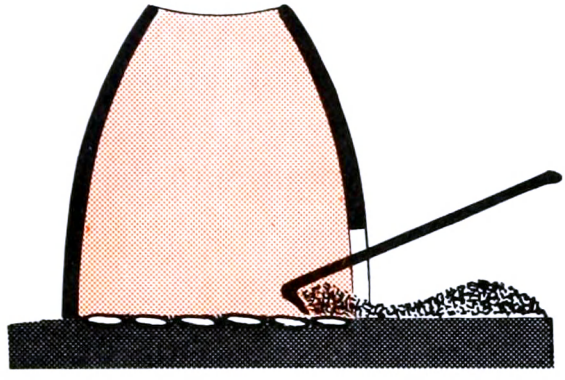


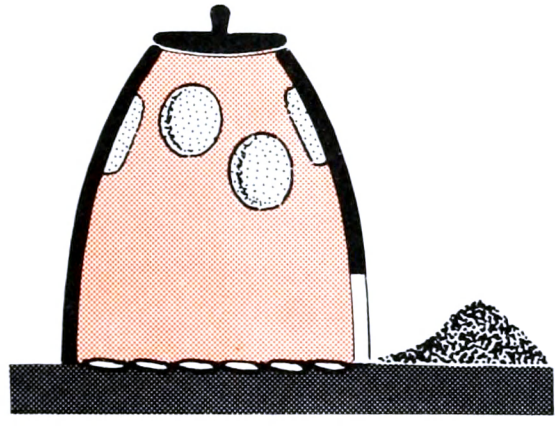
The best pots were hardened in "kilns" like bakers' ovens. They were baked at an even heat for a longer time.

Big pots could be made in this way – and bigger and bigger ones came into use. Oil, wine and grain were stored in them, as well as water, which was precious.





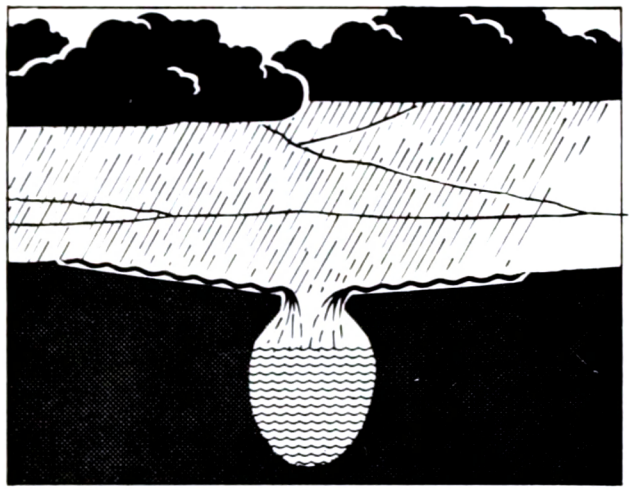




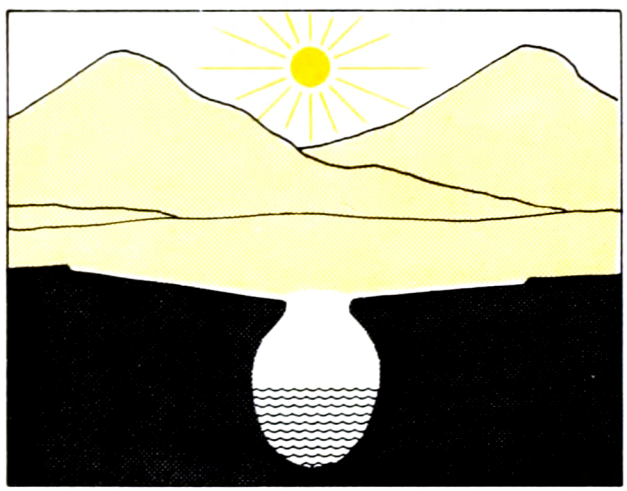
Bakers' ovens were used in Palestine from very ancient times.

The oven was made of clay, shaped like a big pot, with a small opening at one side near the ground, and a hole in the centre of the top.
A brushwood fire was lit inside, heating the whole oven.
Baking needs heat which is not too fierce, but lasts long enough to turn dough into bread. So when the walls of the oven were hot enough, the fire and ashes were raked out.
Then the pieces of wet dough were slapped on to the inside walls of the oven, and left to cook.
The bread was "unleavened" or flat; it did not rise.
Later the people learned to make the bread rise by adding leaven to the dough.

In Palestine there is no rain throughout the hot summer. Many rivers lose their water, and springs dry up. The people could not have lived in the hills if they had not learned to store rainwater.

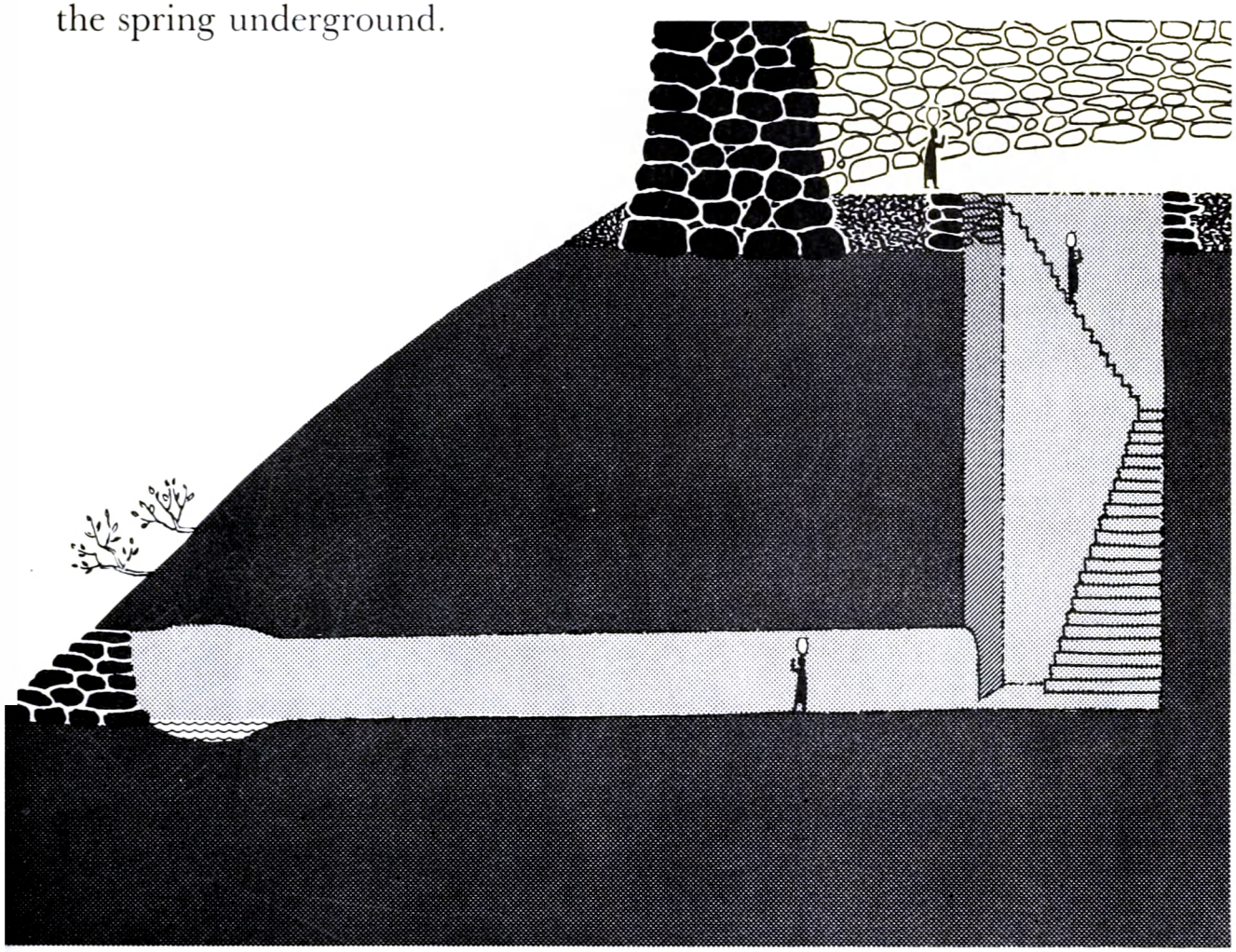


They cut deep pear-shaped holes into the rock and made them watertight. On the rock surface they made grooves so that the rainwater from a wide area would drain into the hole.



They were careful to keep out the sunshine, which evaporates water. Buckets on ropes were used to lift the water, but there were sometimes steps leading down to the water.

Most big towns in Palestine were near good springs, but these were often outside the town walls, at a lower level.
Life in the towns would have been impossible if an enemy cut off their water supply, so several towns built tunnels. In Jerusalem a tunnel led the water from a spring to a pool within the walls. The people of Megiddo built a wall to conceal their spring, and dug a shaft and a tunnel through the rock, so that they could reach the spring underground.

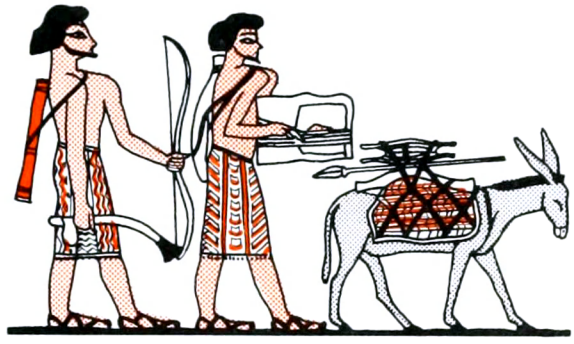


Megiddo stood where one of the most important roads of Palestine crossed a range of hills, not far from Mount Carmel. This road was much used. Many people were on the move: nomads from the deserts nearby came and went, and the people of Palestine often travelled to other countries.

They may have looked like this group of people from an Egyptian picture who are asking for permission to enter Egypt with their animals. The official has noted down the leader's name and the number of people in the group. They probably got pasture for their herds and food for the people as payment for the work they did. Their hairstyles, beards and dresses show that they are different from the Egyptians.

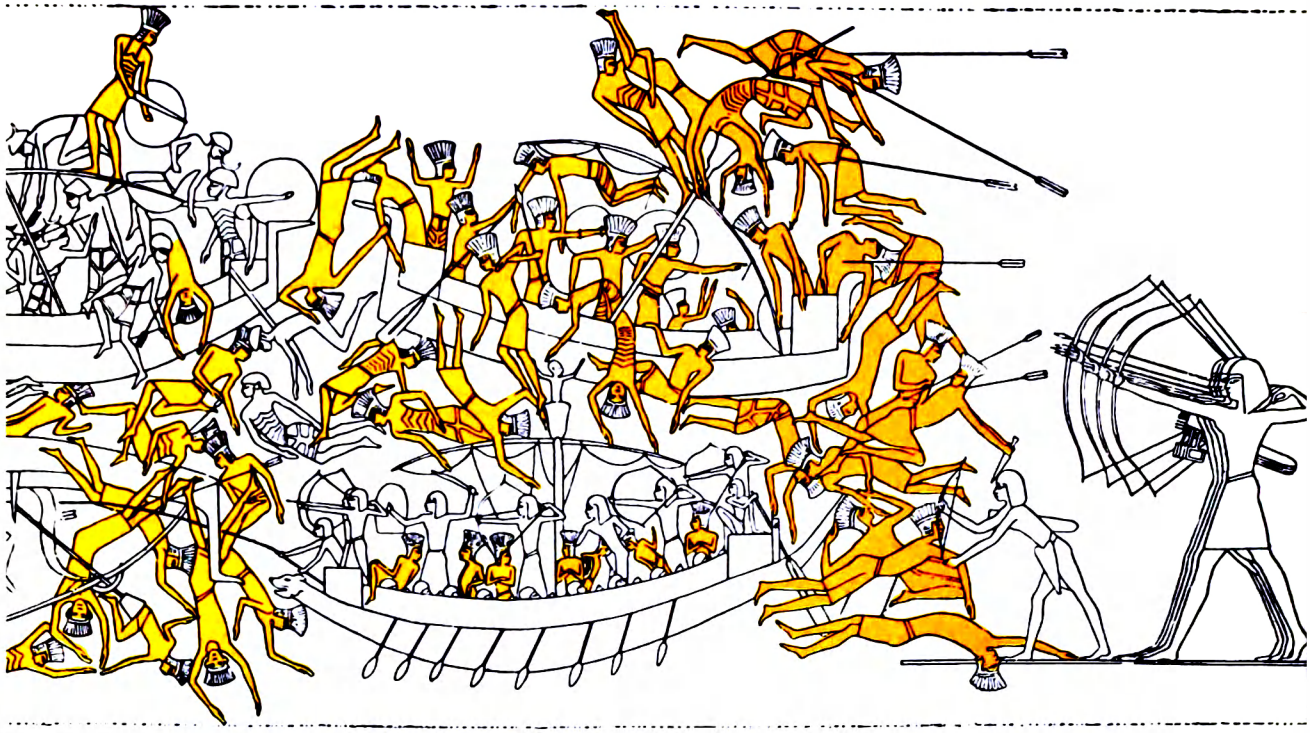
Their clothes were of many colours. Dyes were applied to the thread before it was made into cloth.
Two of the men carry spears. The boy carries something similar: it may be a blow-pipe. Between the children on the donkey's back there is a strange-shaped instrument like a kind of bellows.

The other donkey, too, carries bellows and a blow-pipe: these men earn their living by doing metal work. One of them carries a bow and arrows, the other is playing a lyre. The age-old songs of people like these have come to us through the Bible.



Metal workers used copper and bronze. Much copper is found in the rock to the south of Palestine. Centuries after the time of these travellers, when King Solomon needed copper for his temple and palace, mining and smelting were at their peak.

Iron became known in Palestine shortly before the time of King Solomon. The smelting of iron had been discovered in some out-of-the-way mountains and kept secret. The "sea-people" who moved along the coasts in their boats, invading some lands, learned about this secret and used it.

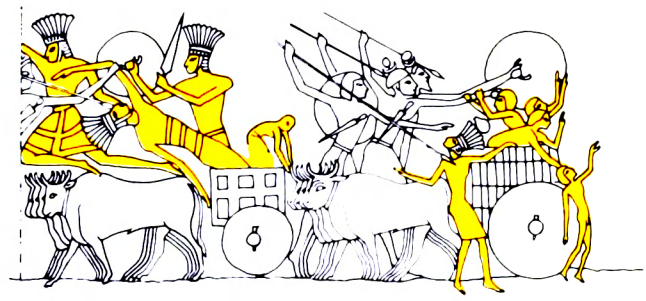


They invaded Egypt and tried to settle there, but the Egyptians fought them fiercely, and the sea-people had to leave. They sailed along the coast until they reached Palestine, where they settled. These people had much in common with the Greeks. They were called the Philistines. Their country was "Philistia" or "Palestine". In this way the country got its name.

These Egyptian pictures show the battles they fought.

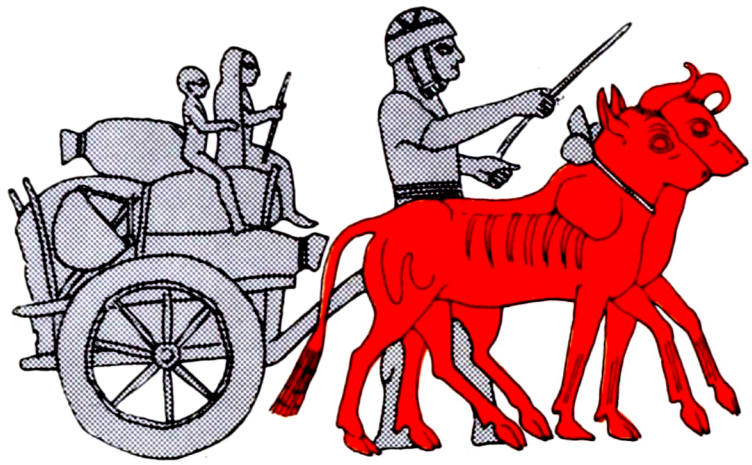
The Philistines can be recognised by their round shields and high helmets which are decorated with feathers.

Their women and children went with them, travelling in ox-drawn carts with solid wooden wheels.



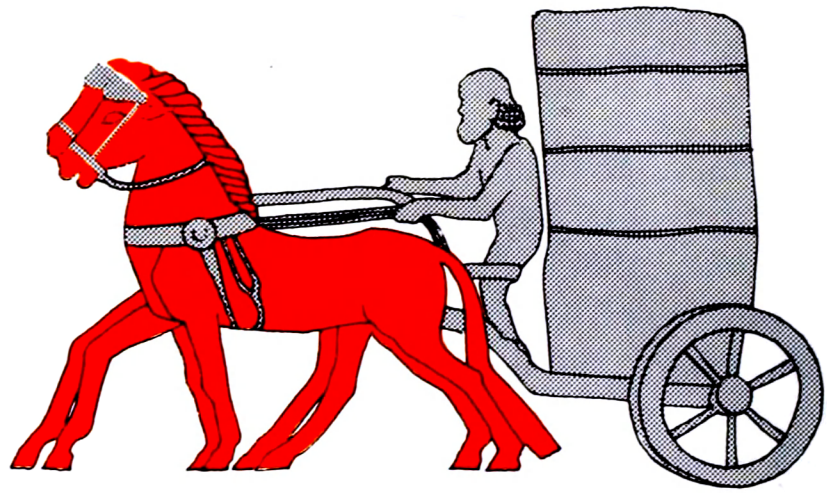
The Philistines built their towns along the coast and held the same strip of land for centuries.
Later they tried to conquer more land but were beaten back by the Hebrew tribes, who were united under one king at that time.
The Hebrews did not only hold back the Philistines. They forced the secret of iron-working from them. They could now make their own weapons and repair their own ploughshares.

Carts were improved in this "iron age". The wheels had spokes and the rim was held with a band of iron. Bullocks were still used. They were strong but slow.



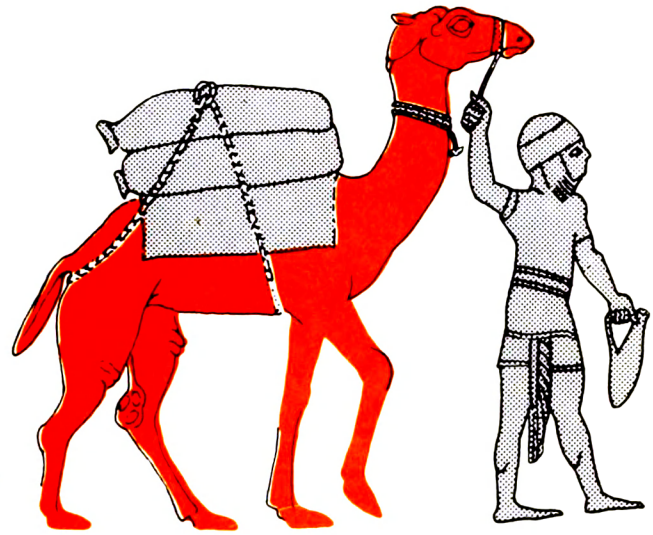
Far away, in Central Asia, people had learned to tame horses.

Horses are strong
and swift,
and when they
were used,
transport
and travel
changed
greatly.

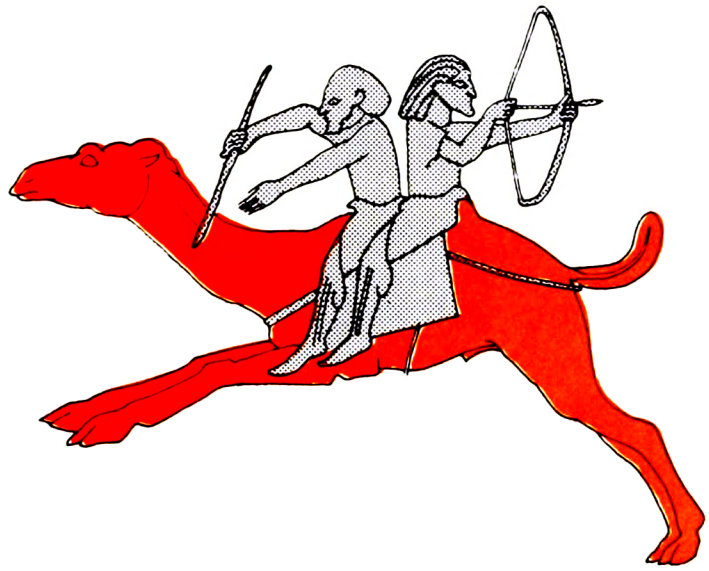


Camels were also tamed. They were much admired, appearing on many monuments and wall pictures.

Camels can carry heavy loads over long distances. They can travel across deserts because, unlike donkeys, they do not have to drink often.
Palestine could now make contact with the distant lands of Arabia beyond the desert.

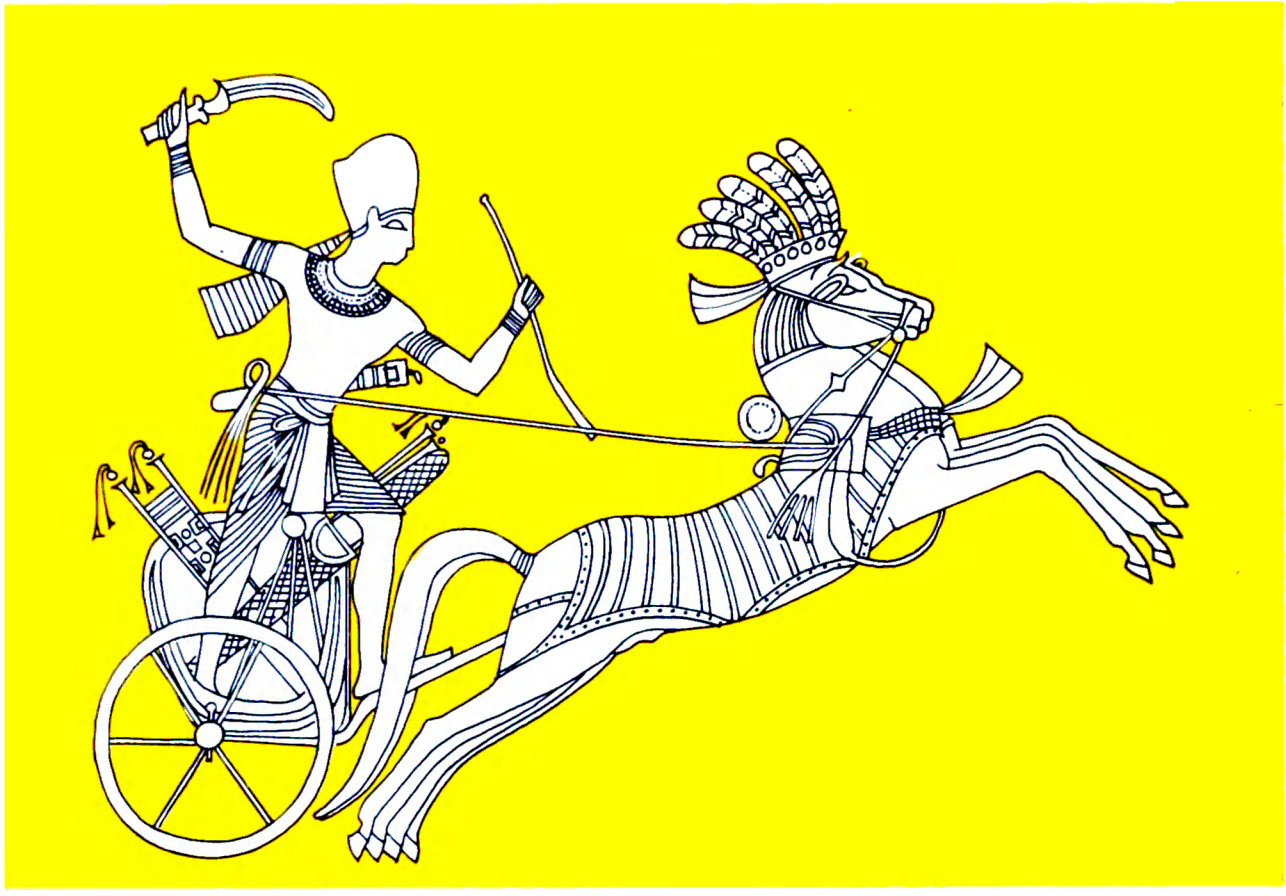


Camels can carry riders, and they were also used in fighting.

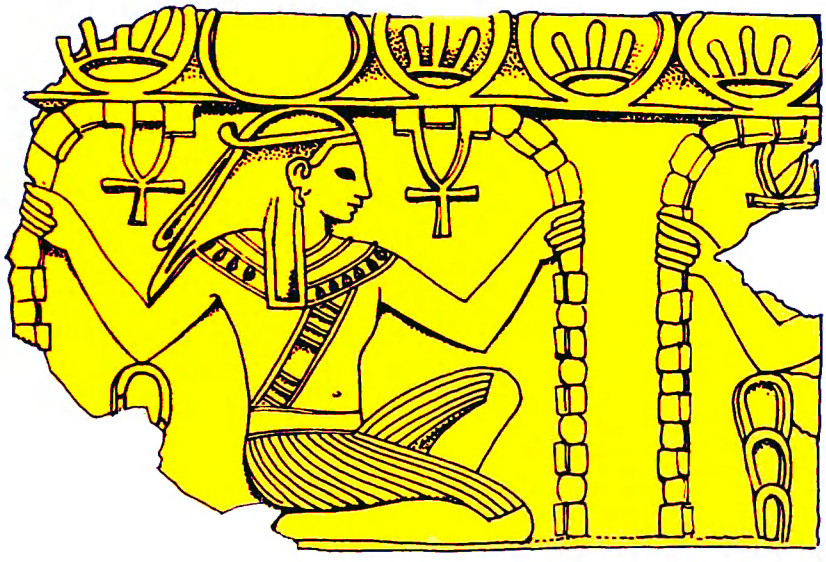


But horses changed warfare much more than camels.

Horses pulled war chariots at high speed.

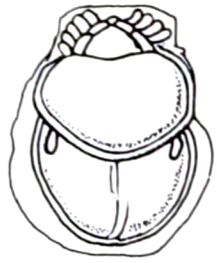


The Egyptians learned this way of fighting.
Their armies passed through Palestine many times on their way north.
They kept law and order in Palestine and built good roads protected by strong fortresses. They let the people live in their own customary ways. However, the people of Palestine learned much from them.



Carvings in ivory were found among the ruins of towns in Palestine. We can see the influence of the Egyptians in some of them.

Others show a style of their own, like this strange creature with human head, animal body and bird's wings. These figures are sometimes called "sphinxes", sometimes "cherubs".



The people of Palestine, like the Egyptians, used scarab-seals to seal their letters and documents. The upper surface of the master-seal was shaped like a scarab beetle.

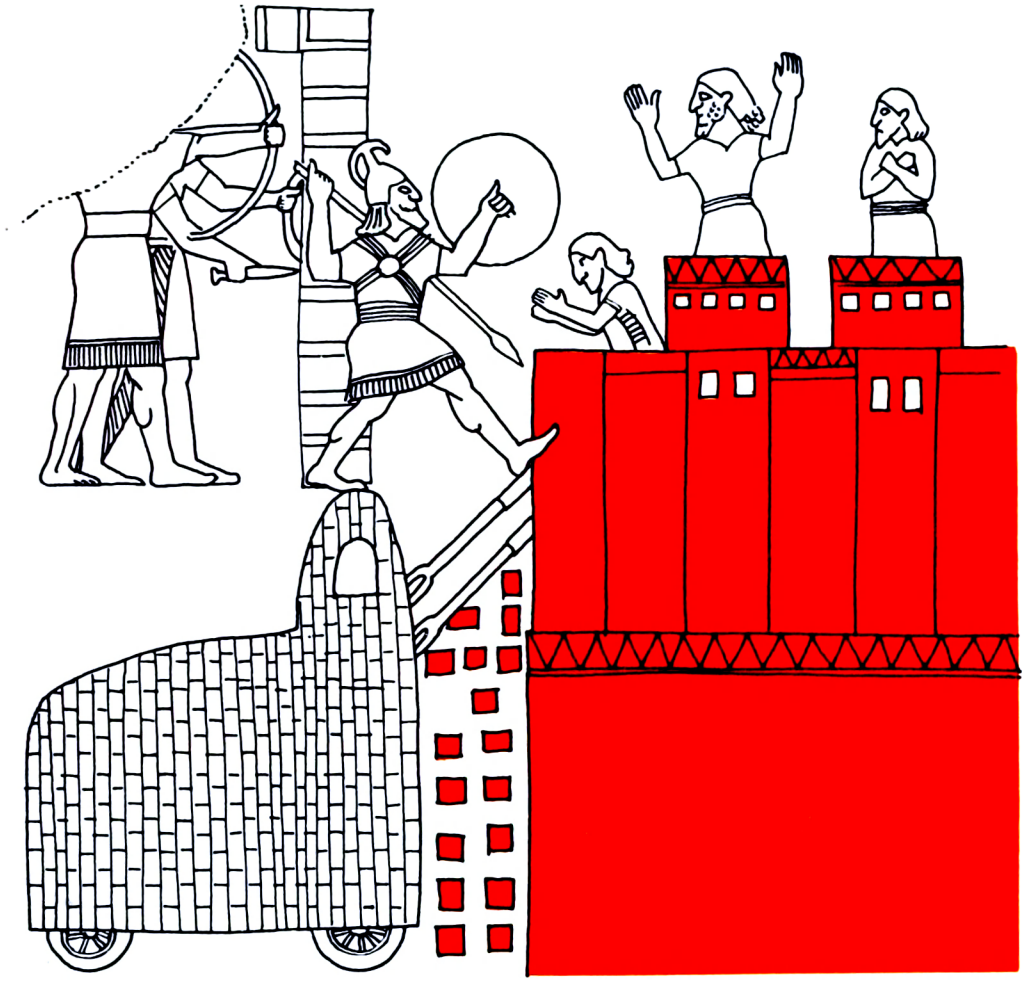
The flat undersurface of the stone was engraved with the owner's sign. When it was impressed on the soft clay it left the sign raised in relief.

The people of Palestine developed their own signs and symbols.

Another type of seal was also in use – the cylinder seal.

A cylinder with a pattern cut into it was rolled on to soft clay leaving its picture behind. This one was made in Palestine.

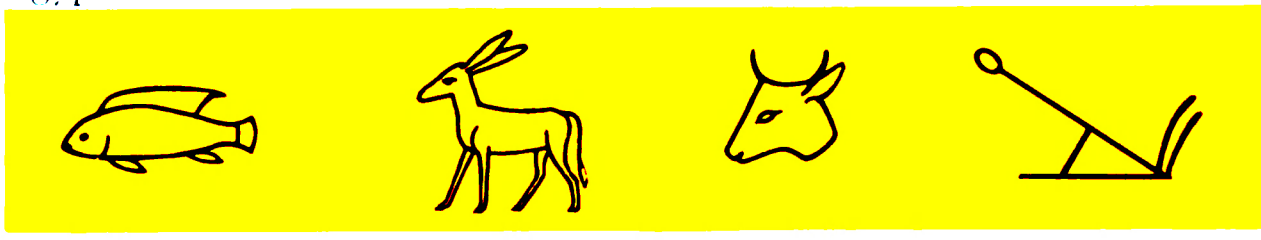
Cylinder seals like this were used in Mesopotamia, with which Palestine traded for a long time.



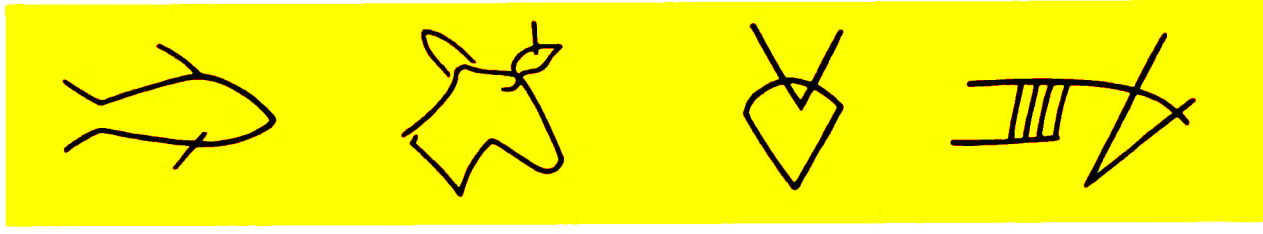
But the people of Mesopotamia also came as conquerors. They deposed the kings and ruled the land. They sent important people into exile. They burned down many cities. Only when their armies were needed in other places did they leave the country, giving the people of Palestine the chance of an independent existence.

In this area, through which the armies of the great empires of the time took their way, an important invention was made: the alphabet, the A-B-C, where letters stand for sounds.
In the first writings of Egypt and Mesopotamia signs stood for things. Here are the signs for fish, donkey, ox and plough:

Egyptian

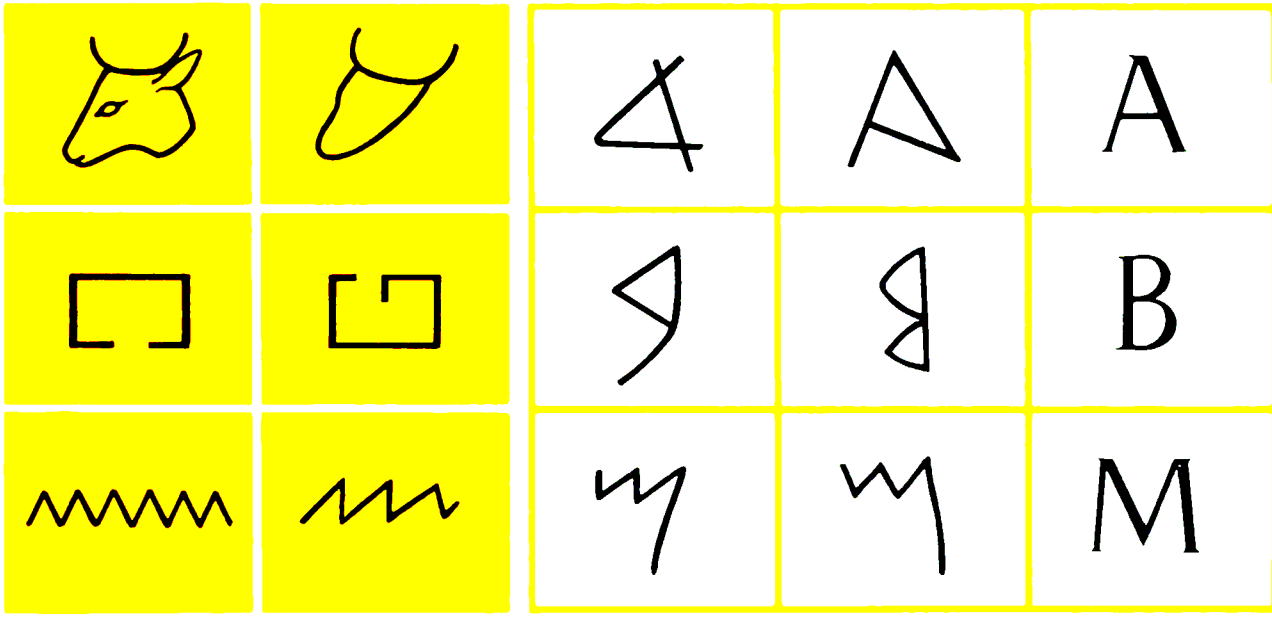


Mesopotamian



But it is not so simple to make signs for words like "yesterday" or "a lie". New rules were needed. Both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian writing became very complicated.
Sometimes, it seems, Egyptian signs were used by people who did not know the Egyptian language. Such signs have been found engraved into stone near the mines of Sinai. Connected with a different language, the signs received new meanings. Some of them stood only for the sound with which the word began. Gradually the signs came to stand for sounds instead of things.

It is believed that our letter A comes from the Egyptian sign for "ox", the letter B from the sign for "house", and the letter M from the sign for "water". Here are some steps in their development:

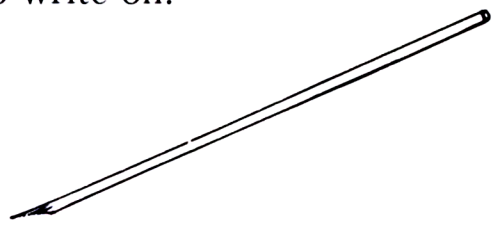


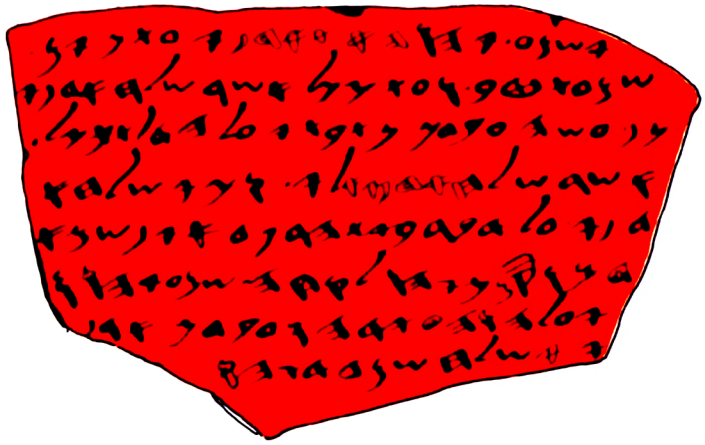
Alpha and Beta are the Greek names for the letters A and B – this gives us the word "alphabet". In Hebrew, A and B are called Aleph and Beth. Beth means "house" – a word used in many town names in Palestine, Bethlehem for example.

Sea traders spread the invention of the alphabet abroad. The Greeks learned it and added letters for more sounds. The Romans learned it from the Greeks and passed it on to us.
There are many alphabets in the world today, but they all come from the same source.

The Hebrews of Ancient Palestine became the most literate people of their time. Every man had to be able to read the holy scriptures.

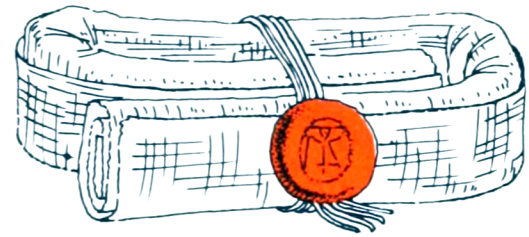
They often used pieces of broken pottery to write on.



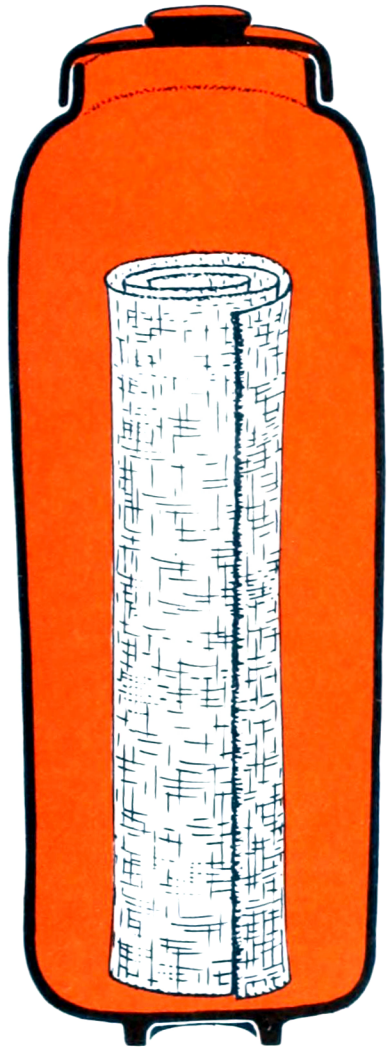


They cut their pens from reeds and used a bluish ink. They wrote from right to left in lines which started at the top. Then they turned the potsherd over, upside down, and continued writing on the other side. This letter was written about 2,500 years ago, when the Assyrians sacked the towns of Palestine.

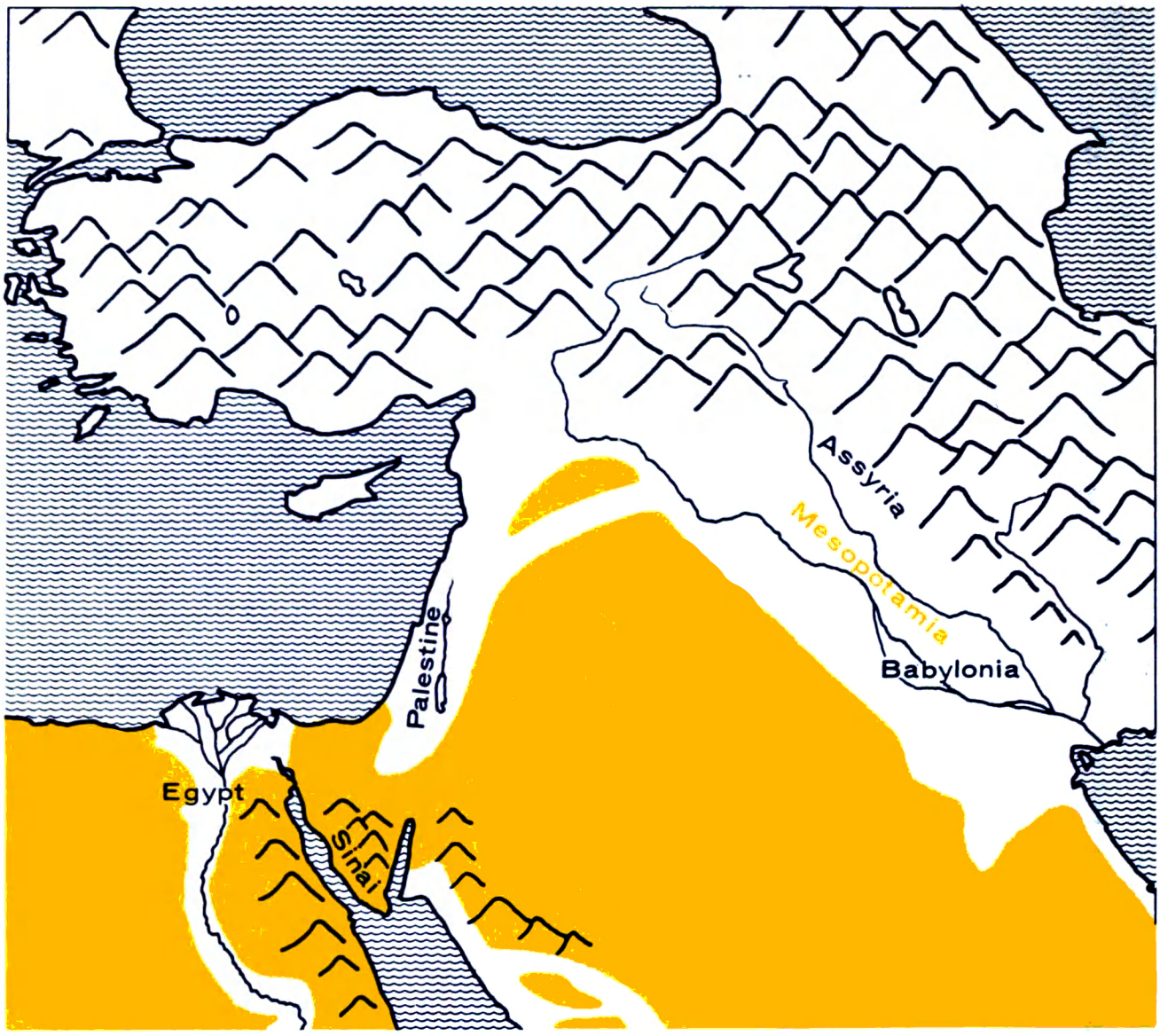
They probably wrote on papyrus too, but we can only guess this, as it does not endure like pottery.



In the drier climate of Egypt, papyrus folded like this has survived.



Sheets of leather or copper were also used. These were rolled up into "scrolls", and the scrolls were kept in jars with lids. Libraries of these scrolls have been found in caves around the Dead Sea. This is how the old books of the Bible were first written.



The Bible is the most widely known book in the world. In it we read of the Hebrews, the Philistines, of Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia.
It tells, too, of the great religions which began in Palestine and spread over the world. From this narrow strip of land between the desert and the sea came skills and ideas which changed the world.